

**File Code:** 1950; 1570**Date:** April 11, 2016**Route To:****Subject:** Request for Emergency Situation Determination - Tower Project**To:** Regional Forester, Northern Region

The Idaho Panhandle National Forests are requesting an Emergency Situation Determination (ESD) pursuant to 36 CFR 218.21 for relief from hazards to human health and safety, recovery of commodity value, and achieving restoration objectives. The Tower Fire burned approximately 24,702 acres, including lands managed by private timber companies, Washington State Department of Natural Resources, and Colville and Idaho Panhandle National Forests. Approximately 17,600 acres are located on National Forest System lands with 12,128 acres on the Priest Lake Ranger District of the Idaho Panhandle National Forests (the Forest). The Forest is preparing an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Tower Fire Salvage and Reforestation Project (Tower Project).

Proposals under the Tower Project include:

- Removal of fire-affected danger trees posing critical threats to safety on approximately 1,209 acres along approximately 52 miles of roads and 8 miles of trail;
- Salvage harvesting of approximately 4,271 acres of fire-killed and fire-injured trees within the perimeter of the Tower Fire; and,
- Reforestation of approximately 5,754 acres of treatment areas would occur.

Immediate implementation of this project is necessary to avoid further delay to address human health and safety concerns and to capture commodity value. Loss of commodity value could jeopardize the accomplishment of resource restoration activities in the Tower Fire area. If sold and implemented in 2016, the proposed salvage and danger tree removal actions would produce an estimated 48 million board feet of saw timber with net positive receipts to the Government of an estimated \$5,030,000.

The granting of an ESD would allow immediate implementation of the Tower Project after appropriate environmental analysis is complete and a decision is signed. This would enable the Forest to take action before substantial timber deterioration could occur, enabling us to reduce the risk of no-bid sales and restore the burned area. Without an ESD, implementation of the Tower Project would most likely not begin until early January 2017 and hazard tree removal and salvage harvest operations may not occur at all in the 2016 season. If weather conditions do not permit operations during the winter months, treatment may not resume until mid-June or July 2017. This delay would have a significant impact on the merchantable volume as well as associated monetary value of the material within the treatment areas and greatly reduce the likelihood of bids on the timber sales. The fire-affected timber is currently marketable and prospective purchasers have expressed interest in the timber sales.



The enclosed Relevant Background Information package provides specific details regarding this ESD request. Questions concerning this request can be directed to Matt Staudacher, Vegetation Staff Officer, at (208) 765-7380 or Karl Dekome, Environmental Coordinator, at (208) 765-7479.

Thank you for your consideration of our project, and I ask that you forward my request to the Chief for his determination.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Farnsworth', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

MARY FARNSWORTH
Forest Supervisor